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ABSTRACT

This report presents results from an internal evaluation conducted between September 1981 and August 1982 of abstracts published by the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. A brief introduction describes the study methodology and reviews limitations, indicating that 526 evaluations of 349 abstracts were conducted by personnel at each of the 16 ERIC Clearinghouses. Next, results of the evaluations prepared by each Clearinghouse are presented, with Clearinghouses being identified only by a random letter of the alphabet. For each Clearinghouse, information is provided on the numbers of abstracts evaluated, evaluations completed, abstractors whose work was represented, and evaluators; overall ratings; types of abstracts represented (i.e., informative, indicative, or mixed) and analysis of their appropriateness; evaluations of abstract style, vocabulary, and content; length of the abstracts evaluated; and details on how the Clearinghouse conducted the evaluations. Next, outcomes are described for the system as a whole, indicating that 67 excellent ratings, 188 good ratings, 150 fair ratings, 91 marginal ratings, and 30 poor ratings were assigned. Common problems included inappropriate selection of abstract type and the omission of important sections of documents. Recommendations for improving abstracts are included. An interim report from an initial pilot study; revisions of the abstract evaluation form; feedback from Clearinghouses regarding the form; sample evaluations; and materials from an abstracting workshop are appended. (BCY)

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ED 438 883

ABSTRACT EVALUATION PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

Submitted to
Central ERIC

by

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and

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EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
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The Abstract Evaluation Project was initiated in spring 1981, when Central ERIC contacted the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges and requested that the Clearinghouse design and implement a project to evaluate abstracts currently being written for the database. During summer 1981, the project was designed, and in September the first evaluation instrument was pilot tested. Between September 1981 and August 1982, during two pilot testings of evaluation forms and three cycles of evaluations, a total of 349 abstracts were evaluated and 526 evaluations were completed.

The following sections provide syntheses of these evaluations by Clearinghouse and for the system as a whole. While these composite evaluations provide a fair idea of abstracting in the ERIC system, certain limitations should be kept in mind while reviewing these findings:

1) While the evaluation instruments requested the evaluators to look carefully at various aspects of the abstracts, they provided no set criteria for assigning "excellent," "good," "fair," etc. ratings. Therefore these ratings were assigned on the basis of personal criteria and are far from standard.

2) Certain Clearinghouses were very lenient in evaluating abstracts, while others were extremely demanding. Certain evaluators focused almost exclusively on writing style, while others tended to ignore style and concern themselves with content.

3) Certain evaluators applied standards that had been developed at their Clearinghouse rather than applying systemwide guidelines.

4) The sample, which was drawn from five different months of Resources in Education, is fairly small given the total number of abstracts that were processed during this period (i.e., 349 out of 6,259 abstracts).

A

Number of A abstracts evaluated:	15
Number of evaluations completed of A abstracts:	30
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	4
Number of evaluations completed by A staff:	32
Number of A evaluators:	1

Overall Ratings:

2 excellent; 7 good; 14 fair; 5 marginal; 2 poor

Of the 30 evaluations completed, 9 provided ratings of good or excellent.

Selection on Abstract Type

Of the 15 abstracts evaluated, 2 used the informative mode, 10 used the indicative mode and 3 used the mixed mode. In 8 cases the evaluators found the choice of abstract type appropriate. In the 7 cases in which the evaluators didn't find the abstract type appropriate, they felt the informative or mixed mode would have been more effective.

Style and Vocabulary

Almost all of UD's abstracts were rated quite highly in all areas of style and vocabulary. Only one of the 16 abstracts evaluated was considered confusing. The other abstracts were felt to be intelligible, logically structured, stylistically well written, and understandable to the non-specialist.

Content

While 9 of the abstracts evaluated covered the important topics of the document, the abstracts that received lower ratings shared what were considered major content problems. The most common criticism of the abstracts was that they provided superficial coverage (six cases). The evaluators felt that eight of the abstracts should have provided additional detail. In eight abstracts, major omissions were noted, such as important topics, research methodology and findings. One abstract was felt to misrepresent the document and in two cases inaccuracies were identified.

Length:

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	4
101-150 words:	4
151-200 words:	6
200+ words:	1

As most of the abstracts used less than 175 words, the evaluators were especially critical of what they considered to be a superficial treatment of the documents.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

All 32 evaluations were completed by the Clearinghouse's editor. She assigned 2 excellent ratings, 17 good ratings, 10 fair ratings, 3 marginal ratings, and no poor ratings.

The consistently rather high ratings are somewhat surprising given the comments that accompanied some of them. In many cases abstracts were rated as good even when they were misleading about the document's content, had major omissions, or misrepresented the document. On the other hand, most of the fair or marginal ratings were given to abstracts considered to be poorly written, to over use professional jargon, even when the content areas were all adequately or completely covered.

Of the 32 evaluations completed 8 misidentified abstract type.

B

Number of B abstracts evaluated: 20
Number of evaluations completed of B abstracts: 31
Number of abstractors whose work is represented: 5

Number of evaluations completed by B staff: 45
Number of B evaluators: 4

Overall Ratings:

5 excellent; 8 good; 9 fair; 8 marginal; and 1 poor

Of the 31 evaluations completed, 13 awarded excellent or good ratings to the abstracts.

Selection of Abstract Type

Of the 20 abstracts in the sample, 6 used an indicative mode, 2 used an informative mode, and 12 used a mixed mode. Choice of abstract type was considered appropriate in 16 cases, and inappropriate in 4 cases.

Style and Vocabulary

For the most part the abstracts were rated highly in the areas of style and vocabulary. Several evaluators commented upon how well written the abstracts were. In only two cases did the evaluators comment that the abstracts were difficult to read or confusing. In only one instance did the evaluators note terms that they felt should have been explained. Twice the evaluators commented that jargon had been overused, and in two instances grammatical problems were identified.

Content:

While in at least 13 cases the abstracts were felt to have covered all of the important topics in the documents, several problems with content were noted in the lower-rated abstracts. In seven abstracts, the evaluators pointed to what they considered major omissions, such as important sections or topics of the document, background information, examples that would have clarified the content of the document, and research methodology. The evaluators felt that five abstracts could have provided additional detail. In three cases, the evaluators indicated that the abstracts failed to give a good overall picture of the content of the document. In no cases were inaccuracies noted.

Length:

0-50 words: 0
51-100 words: 2
101-150 words: 7
151-200 words: 9
200+ words: 2

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Four Clearinghouse staff members participated in the project, including two Abstractors, the Clearinghouse's Associate Director, who also writes abstracts, and the User Services Representative. They awarded 4 excellent ratings, 24 good ratings, 16 fair ratings, and 1 poor rating.

Some of the ratings seemed rather high in light of the comments which accompanied several good and fair ratings, such as comments concerning major omissions, unintelligibility, and failure to provide a good picture of the document.

The evaluators stressed the importance of comprehensive coverage and clearly stating the purpose of a study or document. They seemed quite concerned with abstracts over 200 words in length, especially when they felt that the abstract's length could be reduced by careful editing.

Evaluators, especially the user services representative and the abstractors, seemed to have difficulty in determining abstract type. In the 36 abstracts they evaluated, they misidentified abstract type 11 times.

C

Number of different C abstracts evaluated: 19
Total number of evaluations of C abstracts completed: 33
Number of abstractors whose work is represented: 2

Number of evaluations completed by C staff: 43
Number of C evaluators: 5

Overall Ratings:

5 excellent; 8 good; 13 fair; 4 marginal; and 3 poor

Of the 33 evaluations completed, 13 providing ratings of good or excellent.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 19 abstracts evaluated, 6 used the informative mode, 1 used the indicative mode, and 12 used the mixed mode. In 14 cases, the choice of abstract type was considered appropriate for the document. In five cases, evaluators seemed to feel that either the informative or indicative mode should have been used in place of the mixed mode.

Style and Vocabulary:

For the most part the abstracts were rated quite highly in areas of style and vocabulary. The abstracts were generally considered to be intelligible, to use correct grammar and spelling, to be understandable to the non-specialist, and to provide good topic sentences. In only two instances did evaluators feel that terms used in the abstract should have been explained. Only one abstract was felt to use overly long and complex sentences, and in only one instance were grammatical problems noted.

Content:

Several abstracts were felt to have covered all of the important topics in the documents, however, several problems were common to the lower-rated abstracts. In six abstracts, the evaluators pointed to major omissions, such as important sections of the document, research objectives or findings, and survey response rate in a case where the very low response rate affected the validity of the study. In three cases the evaluators felt the abstracts should have provided additional detail. Twice the evaluators felt the abstracts were not weighted appropriately in terms of the documents' emphases. In only one case did an evaluator feel that the abstract had failed to give a good overall picture of the document. Inaccuracies were pointed out in two abstracts.

Length:

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	1
101-150 words:	7
151-200 words:	9
200+ words:	2

Evaluators tended to feel that the shorter abstracts (less than 150 words) should have provided additional useful information.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Five Clearinghouse staff members participated in the project, the associate director, senior information analyst, two abstractors, and the user services coordinator. They assigned 6 excellent ratings, 12 good ratings, 14 fair ratings, 7 marginal ratings, and 4 poor ratings.

The evaluators stressed the importance of comprehensive coverage of the documents' major topics. They tended to evaluate abstracts in terms of their usefulness, underscoring the importance of providing a clear idea of a document's contents and purpose. They were critical of abstracts which, through complicated sentence structure or poor writing style, are difficult to read.

Of 39 evaluations, 12 misidentified abstract type.

D ' '

Number of D abstracts evaluated:	17
Number of evaluations of D abstracts completed:	32
Number of abstractors whose work was represented:	5
Number of evaluations completed by D staff:	38
Number of D evaluators:	2

Overall ratings:

1 excellent; 18 good; 11 fair; 2 marginal; no poor

Of the 32 evaluations completed, 19 provided ratings of excellent or good. Only two evaluations reflected inadequate abstracts.

Style and Vocabulary

The style and vocabulary of D 's abstracts were consistently rated highly. In only two cases were the abstracts considered unclear or difficult to read. Only one abstract was felt to contain unexplained terms. Many abstracts using an indicative or mixed mode began with "This guide," "This publication," or "The author," which as several evaluators noted is not considered the most appropriate format according to the processing manual.

Selection of Abstract Type

Of the 17 abstracts evaluated, 1 used an informative mode; 5 used an indicative mode; and 11 used a mixed mode. The choice of abstract type was considered appropriate in 12 cases. In the five cases where the choice of abstracts was considered inappropriate, the mixed mode had been used.

Content:

Most abstracts were felt to cover the contents of the documents quite well. Four abstracts were considered by evaluators to have major omissions, such as appendices, important sections, background material, and data tables. Four abstracts were felt to have been weighted inappropriately in terms of the document. In two cases, the abstracts were felt to misrepresent the document either in tone or content. In one abstract an inaccuracy was noted.

Several major problems revealed in many abstracts evaluated during the project did not occur with D 's abstracts at all, such as failure to provide a good picture of the general subject or purpose of the document.

Length:

0-50:	0
51-100:	0
101-150:	1
151-200:	6
200-250:	7
250+	3

The clearinghouse's abstracts tend to exceed the 200-word limit. Several evaluators commented on this as a problem, and suggested means by which the abstracts could have remained under 200 words. In general the evaluators suggested extensive editing, which would be quite costly.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

The evaluators both had processing responsibilities, either as editor or abstractor. One evaluator also had user services responsibilities. In total the evaluators awarded 8 excellent ratings, 7 good ratings, 10 fair ratings, and 4 poor ratings. The user services representative tended to assign higher ratings (7 of the 8 excellent ratings given).

The clearinghouse's evaluators stressed the importance of including methodology and findings in abstracts of research studies. They frequently suggested adding details to short abstracts. Both were very critical of abstracts that failed to provide a true reflection of the contents or format of the document. Both underscored the importance of a readable and complete topic sentence. The user services representative tended to be more critical of poor writing style than the other evaluator.

The clearinghouse's evaluations were very complete, provided very useful suggestions, and in several cases provided alternative abstracts for very poor abstracts.

In 6 of 28 cases the evaluators misidentified abstract type.

. E

Number of E abstracts evaluated:	19
Total number of evaluations completed on E abstracts:	30
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	7
Number of evaluations completed by E staff:	35
Number of E evaluators:	5

Overall Ratings:

1 excellent; 6 good; 8 fair; 9 marginal; and 6 poor

Of the 30 evaluations completed, 7 provided ratings of excellent or good.

Style and Vocabulary

For the most part, E's abstracts were rated highly in areas of style and vocabulary, including intelligibility, logical structure, correct grammar and spelling, understandability to the non-specialist, etc. In only two cases were the abstracts considered unclear or difficult to read. In only one abstract did evaluators point to terms which they thought should have been explained. Grammatical problems were noted in only one abstract.

Selection of Abstract Type

Of the 19 abstracts considered, 10 used an indicative mode, 2 used an informative mode, and 7 used a mixed mode. Choice of abstract type was considered appropriate in 14 cases and inappropriate in 5 cases. Evaluators indicated that in several cases an informative mode would have been more appropriate than the indicative or mixed mode.

Content

While at least 7 of the abstracts were felt to address all of the important topics covered in the documents, several problems were commonly cited in the abstracts receiving lower ratings. Evaluators pointed to major omissions in 13 abstracts, indicating that the abstracts had failed to adequately deal with major concepts or important sections, conclusions, study results and methods. Two abstracts were criticized for failing to provide a good overview of the documents' subjects. Evaluators felt that two abstracts should have provided additional details. In one case, the evaluators felt the abstract misrepresented the abstract.

Length:

0-50 words:	1
51-100 words:	3
101-150 words:	9
151-200 words:	6

Evaluators tended to be especially critical of what they considered important omissions in light of the shortness of many of the abstracts.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Five Clearinghouse staff members participated in the project, including three associate directors and two research associates. They awarded 13 excellent ratings, 17 good ratings, 4 fair ratings, and 1 marginal rating. Overall the ratings were quite high and few comments were included.

Low ratings were assigned when major sections of a document were ignored in the abstract or when the abstract provided an inaccurate picture of the document's contents.

Of the 35 evaluations, 10 misidentified abstract type.

F

Number of F abstracts evaluated:	17
Number of evaluations completed of F abstracts:	29
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	6
Number of evaluations completed by F staff:	43
Number of F evaluators:	6

Overall Ratings:

3 excellent; 14 good; 3 fair; 8 marginal; and 1 poor

Of the 29 evaluations completed, 17 provided ratings of excellent or good.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 17 abstracts evaluated, 6 used the informative mode, 10 used the indicative mode, and 1 used the mixed mode. Choice of abstract type was considered appropriate in 15 cases and inappropriate in 2 cases.

Style and Vocabulary:

While most of the abstracts were rated quite highly in terms of style and vocabulary, several were found to be difficult to read. Three abstracts were felt to use overly long and complex sentences. Evaluators commented that two abstracts were understandable only after several readings. In one abstract the relationship of information appearing in parentheses to the rest of the sentence was considered unclear. One evaluator commented that an abstract was very confusing.

Content:

Most of the abstracts were felt to cover all important topics of the documents. In three cases the evaluators pointed to what they considered to be major omissions, such as an important topic, research objectives, and implications. In two cases the evaluators felt the abstracts were overly generalized and to lack specific details. In three cases the evaluators felt that the abstract was an inadequate representation of the document.

Length:

0-50	0
51-100	1
101-150	3
151-200	13
200+	2

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Six members of the Clearinghouse staff participated in the project, including the Director, Associate Director, a user services specialist, an editor, and two information specialists. They provided a total of 43 evaluations, and 3 excellent ratings, 9 good ratings, 17 fair ratings, 6 marginal ratings, and 7 poor ratings.

These evaluations stressed the importance of "serving the user." They were critical of abstracts that did not provide comprehensive coverage; that failed to define technical terms; that failed to provide a good picture of the overall subject of a document or its format. They frequently found indicative abstracts to lack essential information. One evaluator, when considering selection of abstract type, was most concerned with whether the mode chosen "worked" in the given situation.

In 9 of 29 cases, abstract type was misidentified.

G

Number of G abstracts evaluated:	15
Number of evaluations completed of G abstracts:	33
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	5
Number of evaluations completed by G satff:	43
Number of G evaluators:	4

Overall Ratings:

9 excellent; 18 good; 3 fair; 3 marginal; no poor

Of the 33 evaluations completed, 27 provided excellent or good ratings. This reflects one of the largest proportions of high ratings in the system.

Style and Vocabulary

Overall the abstracts received consistently high ratings in all areas of style and vocabulary, such as intellibility, logical structure, correct spelling and grammar, understandability to non-specialists, good topic sentences, etc. In four cases, the evaluators pointed to terms that they felt should have been explained in the abstract, linking this in some cases to an overuse of jargon. One abstract was felt to lack structure, and another to be unclear.

Selection of Abstract Type

Of the 15 abstracts evaluated, 7 used the informative mode, 4 used the indicative mode, and 4 used the mixed mode. In only 2 cases was the choice of abstract type considered inappropriate.

Content

Again, most of the abstracts were rated quite highly and felt to cover all of the important topics in the documents. The abstracts that received lower ratings had the following problems: evaluators felt that 3 abstracts could have provided additional details; major omissions were noted in two abstracts, e.g., the document's summary or conclusions; one abstract was criticized for failing to indicate the document's purpose. One abstract contained a factual error.

Length:

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	2
101-150 words:	3
151-200 words:	4
200+ words:	5

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Four staff members participated in the project, two abstractors, one editor, and the processing coordinator. They awarded 2 excellent ratings, 11 good ratings, 10 fair ratings, 10 marginal ratings, and 10 poor ratings. This reflects some of the lowest ratings overall of any group of evaluators.

The evaluators were highly critical of poorly written abstracts, especially those which used long and overly complex sentences. Their evaluations stressed the importance of comprehensiveness, appropriate weighting of the abstracts, and the importance of providing an accurate representation of a document and its contents.

In 9 of 43 abstracts the evaluators misidentified abstract type.

Comments on a few of the evaluations implied that a document of questionable quality did not need extensive treatment in the abstract.

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H

Number of H abstracts evaluated: 24
Number of evaluations of H abstracts: 37
Number of abstractors whose work is represented: 2

Number of evaluations completed by H staff: 33
Number of H evaluators: 3

Overall ratings:

11 excellent; 15 good; 9 fair; no marginal; no poor

Of the 37 evaluations completed, 26 provided excellent or good ratings.

Style and Vocabulary

Most of the abstracts were rated highly in all areas of style and vocabulary. One abstract was felt to contain grammatical problems; 2 to be difficult to read; 1 to be redundant in its word usage; and 1 to be confusing.

Selection of Abstract Type

Of the 24 abstracts evaluated, 8 used an indicative mode, 7 used an informative mode, and 9 used a mixed mode. In all cases the choice of abstract type was considered appropriate by the evaluators.

Content

Generally the abstracts were also felt to cover the major topics of the documents. In one case major omissions were noted; 1 abstract was felt not to provide an adequate statement of the document's purpose; 1 to have a weighting problem; and 1 to misrepresent the document.

Length:

0-50 words: 0
51-100 words: 0
101-150 words: 0
151-200 words: 18
200+ words: 8

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Three staff members participated in the evaluations, representing processing, user services, and management. They awarded no excellent ratings, 6 good ratings, 8 fair ratings, 11 marginal ratings, and 8 poor ratings.

The evaluators stressed the importance of abstracts providing the most comprehensive coverage possible. They tended to feel that in most cases abstracts under 175 words in length could have provided additional details or examples. They seemed to consider problems with abstract content, especially major omissions, misrepresentations, and failure to provide a good picture of the overall purpose or subject of a document to be major weaknesses. They considered problems with style and vocabulary to be secondary to subject coverage.

In 1 of 33 abstracts evaluated, abstract type was misidentified.

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M

Number of different M abstracts evaluated: 12
Total number of evaluations of M abstracts completed: 22
Number of abstractors whose work is represented: 5

Number of evaluations completed by M staff: 31
Number of M evaluations: 2

Overall Ratings:

3 excellent; 3 good; 10 fair; 6 marginal; no poor

Of the 22 evaluations completed, 6 provided overall ratings of good or excellent.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 12 abstracts considered, 0 used the informative mode, 5 used the indicative mode, and 7 used the mixed mode. Choice of abstract type was considered appropriate for 7 of the abstracts. In the five cases where abstract mode was considered inappropriate, the evaluators tended to feel that an informative mode would have been more effective than either the indicative or mixed.

Style and Vocabulary:

Generally the abstracts were rated quite highly in the areas of style and vocabulary. Evaluators tended to find the abstracts intelligible, to use correct grammar and spelling, to be understandable to the non-specialist, and to provide good topic sentences. In three cases the evaluators noted terms that they felt should have been explained in the abstracts. In two cases, the abstracts were felt to lack a logical structure. Three abstracts were thought to be difficult to follow.

Content:

In most cases the evaluators tended to feel that the abstracts were too short to adequately cover the contents of the documents. Of the 22 evaluations completed 12 cited major omissions of the abstracts, such as findings, methodology, major topics, or important sections. In one case the evaluator felt the abstract failed to provide a good representation of the overall subject of the document. Inaccuracies were pointed to in one abstract.

Length:

0-50 words: 1
51-100 words: 1
101-150 words: 7
151-200 words: 2
200+ words: 1

As most of the abstracts in the sample used less than 150 words, the evaluators were very critical of what they considered to be major omissions in the abstracts.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Two Clearinghouse staff members participated in the project, the Assistant Director and the User Services Coordinator. They assigned 3 excellent ratings, 18 good ratings, 4 fair ratings, 5 marginal ratings, and 4 poor ratings. Several of the higher ratings were somewhat surprising as the accompanying comments pointed to major omissions, failure of the abstract to reflect the documents tone, overly general abstracts, and such complicated sentences that it took the evaluators several readings to understand the abstract.

The evaluators stressed the importance of comprehensive coverage of all important topics in the document, the value of references to survey instruments and appendices, and weighting abstracts to reflect the documents' emphases. The evaluators misidentified the abstract type in 7 of 31 evaluations.

N

Number of different N abstracts evaluated:	27
Number of evaluations of N abstracts completed:	37
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	3
Number of evaluations completed by N staff:	33
Number of N evaluators:	5

Overall Ratings:

3 excellent; 14 good; 12 fair; 6 marginal; and 2 poor

Of the 37 evaluations completed, 17 provided ratings of excellent or good. Several of the abstracts were rated as fair strictly on the basis of choice of abstract type, with the evaluations revealing that the abstracts were comprehensive and readable.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 27 abstracts considered, 2 used an informative mode, 6 used an indicative mode, and 19 used a mixed mode. Choice of abstract type was considered appropriate in 17 cases. In the 10 cases where abstract type was considered inappropriate, evaluators tended to favor the informative mode over the mixed mode.

Style and Vocabulary:

Generally the abstracts were rated highly in areas of style and vocabulary. They were considered to be intelligible, to use correct grammar and spelling, to be understandable to the non-specialist, and to explain new or technical terms. In only two cases were the abstracts considered difficult to read. Only one lacked a logical structure, and only two were felt to use long and overly complicated sentences.

Content:

Most abstracts were felt to cover the content of the documents well. In those abstracts receiving lower ratings, the most common criticism was that important topics or facts had been omitted (eight evaluators pointed to what were considered important omissions). One abstract was felt to lack sufficient detail. Two were criticized for not providing a good idea of the overall subject of the document.

Length:

0-50 words: 0
50-100 words: 0
101-150 words: 3
150-200 words: 12
200+ words: 12

In several cases the evaluators were concerned that the abstracts were overly long. In two cases they indicated that length was attributable to repeating information.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Five Clearinghouse staff members participated in the project, the associate director, assistant director, two staff members whose responsibilities include abstracting, and a user services/publications representative.

The evaluators assigned 7 excellent ratings, 15 good ratings, 8 fair ratings, and 3 marginal ratings.

The evaluators stressed the importance of providing a good idea of the document as a whole, of appropriate weighting, and of comprehensive coverage. They were very critical of very short abstracts providing superficial coverage. In several cases they felt that purely indicative abstracts had failed to provide enough information about the subject of a document. The importance of including author's names in collections for on-line bibliographic retrieval was stressed.

In 9 of 26 evaluations, the abstract type was misidentified.

0

Number of 0 abstracts evaluated: 16
Number of evaluations completed of 0 abstracts: 26
Number of abstractors whose work is represented: 3
Number of evaluations completed by 0 staff: 30
Number of 0 evaluators: 2

Overall ratings:

3 excellent; 10 good; 7 fair; 5 marginal; 1 poor

Of the 26 evaluations completed, half provided ratings of excellent or good.

Selection of Abstract Type

Of the 16 abstracts evaluated, 1 used an informative mode; 8 used an indicative mode; and 6 used a mixed mode. The choice of abstract type was considered appropriate in 12 cases. In most cases where the choice of abstract type was considered inappropriate for the document, the indicative mode had been used when evaluators felt an informative mode had been called for, e.g., for research studies.

Style and Vocabulary

Generally, the abstracts were rated fairly highly with regard to style and vocabulary. The most commonly identified problems were failure to explain terms or concepts (5 cases); use of overly long and complicated sentences (4 cases); grammatical problems (3 cases); and lack of clarity, due in one case to problems using the mixed mode.

Content:

While at least half of the abstracts evaluated were felt to cover all of the important topics of the documents, the abstracts which received lower ratings evidenced common problems with content. Eight abstracts were felt to have major omissions, such as important sections of the document, study results and methodology, and important appendices. The evaluators felt that six abstracts could have provided additional detail. Three abstracts were felt to misrepresent the contents or format of a document, and another three were considered to provide an inadequate overview of the general subject of the document. Two abstracts contained inaccuracies.

Length:

0-50 words: 0
51-100 words: 2
101-150 words: 3
151-200 words: 10
201-250 words: 1

Most abstracts ranged between 100 and 175 words. Most evaluators who felt that additional details could have been provided were commenting upon fairly short abstracts.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

One evaluator was the Clearinghouse's Assistant Director; the other was an abstractor. The evaluators awarded 8 excellent ratings; 12 good ratings; 6 fair ratings; 4 marginal ratings; and no poor ratings.

The evaluators tended to rate the abstracts rather highly and to make few comments. Surprising high ratings were given to abstracts that the evaluators seemed to feel had major flaws, such as failure to provide an accurate representation of the document, lack of sufficient detail, and major problems in weighting. Both evaluators expressed concern when abstracts repeated information already provided in the title or other cataloging fields.

Abstract type was misidentified in 6 out of 27 abstracts evaluated.

P

Total number of different P abstracts evaluated:	21
Total number of evaluations completed of P abstracts:	31
Number of P abstractors whose work is represented:	3
Number of evaluations completed by P staff:	27
Number of P evaluators:	3

Overall ratings:

5 excellent; 9 good; 8 fair; 5 marginal; and 4 poor.

Of the 31 evaluations completed, 14 provided ratings of good or excellent.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 21 abstracts evaluated, 4 used an informative mode, 8 used an indicative mode, and 9 used a mixed mode. In most cases the choice of abstract type was considered appropriate. In the four cases where the type was considered unsuitable for the document, the evaluators felt that the informative mode would have been more effective than the indicative or mixed mode.

Style and Vocabulary

For the most part the abstracts were rated highly in areas of style and vocabulary. Seven abstracts were considered unclear or difficult to read; this was due to two cases to overly long and complex sentences. Four abstracts contained terms or concepts that the evaluators thought should have been explained.

In two cases the mixed mode was felt to have been used ineffectively by switching between informative and indicative too often for clarity.

Content:

While most of the abstracts that received high ratings covered all of the important topics of the documents, evaluators felt that several other abstracts had major content problems. In ten abstracts, evaluators noted what were considered major omissions, such as important sections, appendices, and, in the cases of research studies, information on findings and results. In two cases the evaluators felt that additional detail and information could have been provided. Three abstracts were felt to contain inaccuracies.

Length:

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	2
101-150 words:	14
150-200 words:	3
200+ words:	2

As the abstracts tended to use between 100 and 150 words, the evaluators were especially critical of omissions and overly general treatments.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Three staff members participated in the abstract project: two of them were abstractors and one was the Assistant Director. The evaluators awarded 3 excellent ratings; 9 good ratings; 10 fair ratings; 4 marginal ratings; and 1 poor rating.

The evaluators tended to comment that abstract length should be reflective of document length. Long abstracts of short documents were felt to misrepresent the document; lengthy documents were felt to require long abstracts.

The evaluators underscored the importance of comprehensiveness, good representation of the overall subject of a document, clarity, and definitions of technical terms. All evaluators felt in some cases that additional detail should have been provided.

In 3 out of 24 abstracts evaluated, the abstract type was misidentified.

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Q

Total number of Q abstracts evaluated:	24
Total number of evaluations completed of Q abstracts:	36
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	4
Number of evaluations completed by Q staff:	35
Number of Q evaluators:	6

Overall Ratings:

3 excellent; 12 good; 9 fair; 4 marginal; 2 poor

Fifteen of the 36 evaluations completed for Q's abstracts reflected ratings of excellent or good. Several of these evaluations included comments on the exceptional quality of the abstracts.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 24 abstracts evaluated, 13 used the informative mode, 3 used the indicative mode, and 8 used the mixed mode. The evaluators considered the choice of mode appropriate in 20 cases. The four cases where the mode was considered inappropriate for the document used the mixed mode. The evaluations indicated that the mixed mode was used in an unclear and ineffective manner in two cases.

Style and Vocabulary:

In most cases the style and vocabulary of the abstracts were rated as being of high quality. In two cases the abstract was considered unclear. In three cases grammatical problems with subject-verb agreement or tense problems were noted. Four abstracts were felt to overuse jargon or to use technical terms without explaining them; in one case an evaluator felt that the abstract was at fault for explaining concepts without using the author's language to name them.

Content:

In most cases the abstracts were found to cover all of the important topics of the documents. Four evaluators pointed to cases in which the abstract could have provided additional details. Seven evaluators noted what they felt were major omissions in the abstracts being evaluated. In two cases the abstracts were evaluated as not providing a good representation of the overall subject of the document.

Four abstracts were found to contain inaccuracies or to misrepresent sections of the document. In one of these cases, evaluators felt that the abstract revealed abstractor bias.

Length:

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	2
101-150 words:	5
151-200 words:	15
200+ words:	2

Q's abstracts tended to come very close to the 200-word limit. In most cases where the evaluators felt that additional detail could have been added or major omissions had occurred the abstracts were under 150 words.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator:

The evaluators were all processing staff. In total, they awarded 2 excellent ratings, 3 good ratings, 15 fair ratings, 9 marginal ratings, and no poor ratings.

They tended to be highly critical of omissions. One evaluator was equally concerned with the style and readability of the abstracts as with their content. Several were very concerned with abstracts well over 200 words, reflecting a Clearinghouse understanding that 200 words were the absolute maximum. Several indicated that it was very important for the abstracts to provide an overall reflection of the purpose and format of the document.

In four of 28 cases, evaluators misidentified abstract type.

R

Total number of different R abstracts evaluated:	27
Total number of evaluations completed of R abstracts:	41
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	4
Number of evaluations completed by R staff:	34
Number of R evaluators:	6

Overall Ratings:

4 excellent; 18 good; 9 fair; 8 marginal; and 2 poor

Of the 41 evaluations completed, 22 provided ratings of good or excellent.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 27 abstracts evaluated, 7 used the informative mode, 8 used the indicative mode, and 2 used the mixed mode. In all but two cases, the choice of abstract type was considered appropriate.

Style and Vocabulary

In general the abstracts received fairly high ratings in the areas of style and vocabulary. Structural or language usage problems resulted in 11 abstracts being rated as unclear or unintelligible. Another commonly cited problem was the use of unexplained terms or jargon--evaluators noted this problem in 6 abstracts. In only two cases were grammatical problems noted.

Content:

Over half of the abstracts covered all of the important topics of the documents. Low ratings for ten of the abstracts were due to what the evaluators considered to be important omissions, such as the results and methodology of research studies, important sections, or background information. Three abstracts were considered to lack sufficient detail; while five abstracts were criticized for not adequately representing the overall subject of a document. Evaluators pointed to inaccuracies or misrepresentation of the document in 4 abstracts.

Length:

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	3
101-150 words:	7
151-200 words:	14
200+ words:	3

Most of the abstracts were close to 200 words.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator

Six staff members participated in the abstract project. While most of the evaluators were abstractors, management and user services were also represented. The evaluators awarded a total of 4 excellent ratings, 7 good ratings, 13 fair ratings, 5 marginal ratings, and 5 poor ratings.

The evaluators tended to give equal weight to style, content, and choice of abstract type. Problems recognized in any of these areas were likely to result in low ratings.

The evaluators stressed the importance of readability, accurate representation of the contents or format of a document, weighing of the abstract in the same manner as the document, and appropriate use of the mixed mode. In two cases, in-house guidelines for abstracts seemed to be confused with the guidelines provided in the processing manual.

In 4 of 30 cases, the evaluators misidentified abstract type.

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S

Number of different S abstracts evaluated:	15
Total number of evaluations completed of S abstracts:	24
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	6
Number of evaluations completed by S staff:	32
Number of S evaluators:	1

Overall ratings:

2 excellent; 8 good; 7 fair; 3 marginal; and 4 poor

Of the 24 evaluations completed, 10 provided ratings of excellent or good.

Selection of Abstract Type:

Of the 15 abstracts evaluated, 5 used the informative mode, 9 used the indicative mode, and 1 used the mixed mode. In all cases, the choice of abstract type was considered appropriate. Only one other Clearinghouse was considered to have used the appropriate abstract type so consistently.

Style and Vocabulary

Generally S's abstracts were rated quite highly in all areas of style and vocabulary. In only two cases did the evaluators find abstracts difficult to follow and in only three cases did they comment on technical terms that should have been explained. In most other cases the abstracts were considered very well written.

Content:

Six of the abstracts were felt to have covered all of the important topics in the documents. Among those abstracts that received lower ratings, the most frequent criticisms were that the abstracts were too general (6 cases) or had major omissions (5 cases), such as study purposes or results, implications, and authors/titles in the case of a collection. In one instance, the evaluators found the abstract to be misleading and, in one case, to provide an inadequate representation of the overall subject of the document.

Length:

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	4
101-150 words:	3
151-200 words:	8

Given that most of the abstracts evaluated were less than 175 words long, the evaluators tended to be especially critical of abstracts that they felt provided superficial coverage or that lacked details and examples that could have clarified the subject of the document.

Clearinghouse as Evaluator:

Only one evaluator, the Assistant Director, participated in the abstract project. She assigned 2 excellent ratings; 2 excellent-good ratings; 13 good ratings; 2 good-fair ratings; 5 fair ratings; 5 fair-marginal ratings; 6 marginal ratings; and 2 poor ratings.

S's evaluations revealed a preference for the informative mode, with comments indicating that in many cases the indicative mode fails to provide a clear indication of the subject of a document. In several evaluations, comments were made indicating that an abstract's length should be reflective of the document's length. Most evaluations stressed the importance of weighting in an abstract, with low ratings given to abstracts that omitted sections or understressed sections that seemed to be of significance in the document. The evaluator underscored the importance of indicating the presence of appendices, especially those containing survey instruments. The evaluator pointed out grammatical flaws and stylistic problems in the abstracts, yet understood that abstracts did not merit low ratings simply on the basis of these problems. Clarity, comprehensive coverage, and proper choice of abstract type were considered critical evaluation criteria.

S was the only clearinghouse to have identified abstract type correctly in all cases.

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T

Number of different T abstracts evaluated:	41
Total number of evaluations completed of T abstracts:	62
Number of abstractors whose work is represented:	3
Number of evaluations completed by T staff:	38
Number of T evaluators:	3

Overall ratings:

7 excellent; 20 good; 18 fair; 15 marginal; and 2 poor

Of the 62 evaluations completed, 27 provided ratings of excellent or good.

Selection of Abstract Type:

In the sample of 41 abstracts, 8 informative abstracts, 20 indicative abstracts, and 13 mixed abstracts were used. Evaluators felt that the choice of abstract type was appropriate in 34 cases and inappropriate in 7 cases.

Style and Vocabulary

For the most part, T's abstracts were rated highly in the areas of style and vocabulary. They were generally considered to be understandable, to explain new and technical terms, and to provide good topic sentences. In 6 of 42 abstracts, the evaluators pointed to what they considered to be serious grammatical errors, such as lack of subject-verb agreement, mixed or incorrect tenses, or complicated difficult-to-follow sentences. In only two cases did evaluators recommend a more logical structure.

Content

While 27 of the abstracts evaluated were felt to have covered all of the important topics in the documents, several problems were commonly recognized in the abstracts receiving low ratings.

Authorship of specific sections and articles tends not to be indicated. (This was the case in three of the three abstracts where authorship statements would have been appropriate.)

Five abstracts were felt to be unreflective of the document.

Evaluators indicated that 6 abstracts were too general; that they lacked specific details that would have been useful in understanding the contents of the documents.

Abstracts of research and evaluation studies tended to be weak with respect to methodology and findings. (Abstracts of 9 research studies were evaluated, methodology was considered to have been inadequately covered in 8 abstracts and findings inadequately covered in 4.)

In cases where several related documents were being processed in one issue of RIE, the abstracts tried to relate the documents in hand with other documents in a manner that was considered confusing. Several evaluators felt that the abstracts should restrict themselves to the document being abstracted and allow the note field to guide the user to other related documents.

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Length

0-50 words:	0
51-100 words:	1
101-150 words:	11
150-200 words:	20
201-250 words:	5
250+ words:	5

CE as Evaluator

Three members of the Clearinghouse staff participated in the evaluations: an abstractor, the processing manager/editor, and acquisitions coordinator. They assigned 2 excellent ratings, 15 good ratings, 8 fair ratings, 5 marginal ratings, and 8 poor ratings.

The acquisitions coordinator assigned consistently high ratings. The other two evaluators stressed the importance of abstracts being clearly written and that they define terms that might not be easily understood. Both evaluated abstracts in terms of their usefulness to the abstract user. While the evaluators pointed to omissions, they tended to weigh these omissions in terms of their importance to the document. They were concerned with comprehensiveness and the use of the appropriate abstract type.

In 6 of 29 cases, evaluators misidentified abstract type.

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System as a Whole

Overall Ratings:

Of the 526 evaluations completed, 67 excellent ratings, 188 good ratings, 150 fair ratings, 91 marginal ratings, and 30 poor ratings were assigned. As noted in the introduction, these ratings cannot be taken at face value. They do provide, however, a fairly good overall look at quality in the system. If the evaluations were redone, methods instituted to insure consistency, standards established for assigning each rating, the ratings would certainly change. Several excellent ratings would become good, fair or perhaps even marginal; several poor ratings would become marginal, fair, or perhaps even good. Overall, however, it is likely that the pattern would remain much the same.

As can be seen, a little less than half of the evaluations providing ratings of good or excellent. Given that a certain number of the fair evaluations were assigned on the basis of rather minor problems, it would probably be reasonable to assume that between 175 and 200 of the abstracts evaluated were acceptable by ERIC standards.

Selection of Abstract Type

Selection and use of abstract type remains a fairly significant problem. Evaluators misidentified abstract type on 105 of 526 evaluations. This, of course, is not a critical problem when the evaluators were user services or management personnel. It does however reflect a potentially serious problem in cases where these evaluators were abstractors themselves. If abstractors are unable to tell one mode from another, chances are much greater that they will mix modes improperly or choose an inappropriate abstract type.

Indeed, the evaluators felt that the choice of abstract type had been inappropriate for 66 of 349 evaluations.

The evaluations revealed that each abstract type has strengths and potential weaknesses. The informative abstract has the greatest potential for providing information to the user. However, the effectiveness of this abstract type is based on the reader's ability to infer what the document contains from what the abstract says. In several cases, the evaluators felt that the informative abstract had failed to give the reader a good idea of what the document contained.

The indicative abstract, on the other hand, allows the abstractor to tell the user exactly what the document contains. Used ineffectively, however, the abstractor can fail to tell the user what the document is about. To indicate that "study methodology is detailed" is singularly useless if the reader has no idea of what the study sought to determine and how it went about doing so. To say that various aspects of a reading program are described is very unhelpful if the abstract fails to give an idea of how this reading program differs from countless others. In most cases, where the indicative mode was considered inappropriate, it had failed to give an good picture of the document's subject.

The mixed mode abstract has enormous potential for providing a great deal of information and indicating to the user exactly what the document contains. It must however be used very carefully. Abstracts which switch from the informative to indicative modes throughout are extremely difficult to read and make it.

hard to determine both what the document contains and what it is about. In several cases, the evaluators agreed that the mixed mode was appropriate, but felt that it had been used improperly. In some cases, the evaluators tended to indicate that certain Clearinghouses over-rely upon the mixed mode.

Style and Vocabulary

The ERIC Processing Manual adjures the Clearinghouses to use good prose style in their abstracts. It recommends the use of varied sentence patterns, varied in terms of length and voice. It stresses the importance of good topic sentences and logical structure, and cautions abstractors about readability and understandability.

These standards were reflected in the abstract evaluation form. Some evaluators tended to feel that these standards of writing style were unimportant, feeling that varied sentence patterns were secondary to information density or that abstractors must assume that the users of the system have enough knowledge of a particular field to understand its terminology and jargon. Other evaluators felt that good writing style is critical to good abstracting.

The most common problem identified was that the abstracts tended to use the same sentence patterns, but most evaluators agreed that this wasn't a serious problem. Within this category of problem, the excessive and monotonous use of the passive voice was considered the most serious.

Probably the most serious problem, and one that occurred with some frequency, was the lack of readability of certain abstracts. In many cases, the evaluators found an abstract "intelligible" only after several readings. In some instances this was due to very long and complicated sentences. In some cases, examples were provided in parentheses and the evaluators were unable to tell to what these examples referred. Unclear or indefinite anticedents of pronouns was another problem that detracted from the understandability of abstracts.

Several spelling errors were identified in the abstracts. It is impossible to tell, however, whether these usually typographical errors were the responsibility of the abstractor, the OCR scanner, or the type-setter. Spelling errors were considered a major problem when the names of individuals or instruments were incorrectly spelled.

Certain evaluators were able to identify even minor grammatical problems, such as the proper use of punctuation and hyphenation. Most were either not as knowledgeable or not as concerned with these minor problems. However, many serious grammatical problems, which detract from the overall image of quality of the ERIC system, were also identified. These included lack of verbs, lack of subject-verb agreement, and inconsistent use of tenses.

Content

The most serious content problem, and the one occurring with greatest frequency, was the omission of important sections or topics of a document. Another common and serious problem was the misrepresentation of a document. In several cases, the evaluators indicated that they had been lead to expect something very different from a document than what they found when they went to the document itself. A fairly rare, but serious problem was that of inaccuracies.

Evaluators frequently felt that short abstracts, even when providing a good general description of a document, could have provided many additional and helpful details by using the entire 200 words allowed. Another commonly cited problem was that of weighting. In some cases, this was considered a serious problem when the emphases of the abstract tended to give a distorted picture of the document.

Most evaluators tended to agree that if a document contains a survey instrument or extensive data tables, these items should be noted in the abstract.

Certain evaluators stressed the importance of including the names of authors of sections or articles within a document in the abstract, pointing out the value of this information for on-line retrieval.

Length:

Short abstracts of less than 150 words are very common in the system, especially among certain Clearinghouses. Most evaluators indicated that short abstracts were acceptable, as long as all important aspects of a document were covered. They were very critical of short abstracts that omitted sections, glossed over contents, or failed to give a good indication of the document's subject. Some evaluators, generally from Clearinghouses that consistently approach or exceed the 200-word limit on length, felt that in most cases abstracts should use the entire space allotted to provide as much information as possible.

Very long abstracts (i.e., exceeding 250 words) were also fairly common among a few Clearinghouses. Some evaluators saw this as a problem and suggested that careful editing would have reduced the length of the abstracts. When considering long abstracts, it must be realized that a substantial amount of time would be needed to reduce the lengths of these abstracts without affecting the amount of information provided.

As several evaluators noted, length per se is not an especially useful criterion for judging abstracts. They felt that the number of words is not as important as how effectively these words are used.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the Abstract Evaluation Project, the following recommendations are made:

A systemwide workshop for abstracting and editing staff should be convened to accomplish the following purposes:

1) increase understanding of the differences between abstract types and the documents for which each type is most appropriate;

2) help Clearinghouses use the mixed mode effectively and only when it is appropriate;

3) promote the practice of editing in the Clearinghouses to lessen the number of grammatical errors, spelling errors, and factual errors, as well as to insure the readability of abstracts.

4) review the guidelines established in the ERIC Processing Manual for informational content for specific types of documents.

5) achieve a greater consensus among the Clearinghouses as to the purpose of ERIC abstracts.

ERIC personnel, including Central ERIC and Clearinghouse staff members and the Steering Committee, should consider methods for periodic or on-going review of abstract quality.

Central ERIC should investigate the relationship between unit cost and abstract quality, taking into account abstractor salaries, expectations of abstractor productivity, and amount of time expended on editing. A determination should be made as to what level of quality is expected systemwide and how much more time and money will be needed to achieve this level of quality. Abstractors who are expected to produce an abstract in 15 or 20 minutes will never achieve the quality of those who are permitted an hour or more to complete an abstract. Abstracts that never go throgh an editing process will always contain more errors in writing and content than those that undergo a thorough editing.

A. Interim Reports #1 and #2

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ABSTRACT EVALUATION PROJECT

Interim Report #1
January 13, 1982

Results of the Pilot Study

In October we sent out three abstracts to be evaluated by each Clearinghouse as a pilot test of the abstract evaluation form and to determine whether the form could be used consistently by all Clearinghouses and evaluators.

We discovered:

(1) though most people found the form easy to use, a significant number had difficulty determining publication type. The pilot also revealed a need for more specific questions related to overall abstract quality to draw more substantive responses from the evaluators.

(2) there was very little consistency among the evaluators. While all three abstracts had very serious problems, all three received overall evaluations ranging from Good to Poor. Serious problems, such as the inclusion of misinformation, the failure to reflect the purpose of a document, and failure to give consideration to a major portion of the document, were ignored by many Clearinghouses.

We responded to the Clearinghouses with very specific letters pointing out the failings of each of the abstracts and of each of the evaluations. We asked that the evaluations be performed more thoughtfully and conscientiously.

We revised the form to alleviate the problems experienced by those evaluators who had difficulty in completing the pilot-tested version, and mailed out new forms, a revised set of instructions, an explanatory cover letter, and an assignment of 16 abstracts to be evaluated on December 7 requesting their return by January 4, 1982.

Tentative Results of the First Series of Evaluations

The January 4th deadline was very difficult for most Clearinghouses to meet due to the holidays and the fact that the microfiche shipments from EDRS were delayed by three weeks; most Clearinghouses had not received their November 1981 microfiche by December 14th.

By January 13, 1982 we had received complete sets of evaluations from 13 Clearinghouses (CS, EA, EC, HE, JC, PS, RC, SO, SP, TM, UD, CG & CE), one partial set of evaluations from FL, and a letter from SE indicating the reasons for the delay in their response.

The evaluations we received reveal that:

(1) some Clearinghouses seem to have established their own standards of abstract writing, apart from the Processing Manual, which they are applying in their evaluations.

(2) great inconsistency remains in the evaluations. Many evaluators are having difficulty recognizing good and poor abstracts. Good abstracts were rated as poor not because they did not cover the content of the documents adequately, but because they used a complicated writing style or because they did not follow Clearinghouse-specific guidelines in their approach. Poor abstracts were given good or excellent ratings, perhaps because they are easy to read, perhaps because the evaluator did not examine the document closely enough.

(3) some evaluators, especially those who are involved in Clearinghouse activities other than abstracting or editing, are following the guidelines of the Processing Manual too closely. They quote the Processing Manual's overall guidance regarding a document type, rather than considering whether specific document characteristics may make following a specific guideline inappropriate for a particular document.

(4) some evaluators are not aware of the guidelines at all. For example, one 215-word abstract was rated down as being too short.

These problems with the evaluations make it impossible to send the abstract-originating Clearinghouses back the evaluations as originally intended. The well-done evaluations providing thoughtful criticism cannot be mixed in with those that were completed thoughtlessly or in ignorance. The Clearinghouses receiving such a mixture of critiques would be justified in dismissing the validity of the whole project.

We propose the following alteration in the research design:

Instead of selecting a large sample of abstracts to be evaluated only once, we will select a smaller sample of abstracts to be evaluated by four Clearinghouses. Our Clearinghouse will collate the four evaluations and provide a composite of the responses. We will send back the evaluations with comments on the appropriateness of the content and comments to the evaluators. We will not provide feedback to the originating Clearinghouse until the evaluations are reliable. We expect that the effort used to educate the evaluators about the qualities of good and bad abstracts and about the processing manual will have a beneficial effect on abstract quality as well, as most of the evaluators are involved in either abstracting or editing of abstracts.

Because many Clearinghouses are finding the 16-abstract assignments overly burdensome, and because our Clearinghouse will be responsible for providing a composite evaluation of each of the abstracts selected for evaluations, we are going to reduce the size of the evaluation assignments to 12 absts. a month. We anticipate raising this number back to the original 16 for the last month of the project in order to have a sufficiently large and representative sample for the final evaluation of the abstracts, scheduled for July 1982.

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ABSTRACT EVALUATION PROJECT

Interim Report #2
April 14, 1982

Tentative Results of the Second Series of Evaluations

On February 2, 1982 the Clearinghouse mailed out a letter to the Directors of the Clearinghouses, informing them of the problems of consistency and differing standards revealed by the first series of evaluations; advising them of certain methodological changes; and assigning each Clearinghouse 12 abstracts from the January issue of Resources in Education to be evaluated and returned by March 1st.

By the third week in March, all but one Clearinghouse had returned completed evaluations for their assignments and the Documents Coordinator began assessing the results and preparing feedback. . This involved:

(1) preparing composite evaluations from the 3-4 submitted evaluations. These composites include all of the valid comments from the evaluators and attempts in very constructive and positive terms to provide an evaluation which will be useful to the originating abstract. Samples of these composite evaluations are enclosed. While it was our original intention to use these composite evaluations solely for the purpose of aligning the standards of excellence applied by the evaluators, these composite evaluations are proving to be so detailed and helpful that we have determined to share them with the abstractors as well as the evaluators.

(2) providing feedback to the individual evaluators. At times the evaluators have applied standards which are Clearinghouse-specific and not enumerated in any ERIC systemwide guidelines. Some evaluators are taking the project as an opportunity to comment on indexing and cataloging problems. The Documents Coordinator has been writing brief informal notes to point out when a criticism is not valid in terms of ERIC policies. Examples of these notes are also attached.

As can be expected these two steps involve a great deal of time; especially when the comments of the evaluators must be validated using the original documents and abstracts, when the composite evaluations are seen as constructive, purposeful feedback, and when the comments to the evaluators are necessarily diplomatic and forceful.

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The amount of time required, though well spent and resulting in potentially useful products, is frustrating. It is important to provide feedback to the evaluators as quickly as possible, to insure that the project does not lose momentum, and to accomplish as many series of evaluations as possible. However speed is not possible; each composite evaluation requires at least an hour, with this time extended when the evaluations are incomplete or contradictory. At this point, 15 abstracts, the work of 5 Clearinghouses remain to be processed.

As soon as these abstracts are dealt with, the Clearinghouses will receive:

(a) the 12 evaluations of abstracts they submitted in March, with comments about evaluation quality, appropriateness, etc.;

(b) composite evaluations for each of these abstracts to be compared with their own evaluations;

(c) composite evaluations for each of the 3 abstracts from their Clearinghouse that were assessed;

(d) a new assignment of abstracts to be evaluated within one month. The new assignment will consist of eight abstracts, a reduction to allow the Documents Coordinator to reduce the amount of time spent in preparing the composite evaluations.

(e) whatever Abstract Evaluation Project forms and instructions that the Clearinghouses seem to be missing.

Additionally, as soon as the second series of evaluations is processed, Interim Report #3 will be prepared to provide an overview of the abstracting and evaluation problems revealed so far by the project.

B.
VARIOUS VERSIONS OF THE ABSTRACT EVALUATION CHECKLIST AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE.

ABSTRACT EVALUATION FORM -- INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

OVERALL INSTRUCTIONS

* The original document must be used to complete the evaluations.

* Comments, in addition to being specific and constructive, must be legible and understandable.

* While comments are required to support poor ratings, comments that point out when something is well done are also welcome.

* The evaluation form is based on the Abstracting section of the ERIC Processing Manual. It may be useful for those unfamiliar with this section of the EPM to read it before attempting to use the form.

ABSTRACT IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

Clearinghouse Accession No.	--	include both Clearinghouse acronym and accession number.
Abstractor	--	indicate the abstractor's initials or that the abstract is an author abstract or an edited author abstract. Evaluate author abstracts as you would any other abstract.
Document Type	--	provide numeric or descriptive identification of the document type (e.g., 143 or Research Report)
Position	--	indicate the job title of the evaluator.

A. SELECTION OF DOCUMENT TYPE

According to the ERIC Processing Manual, selection of the abstract type "depends upon the format or structure of the document and the author's organization of the information." An informative abstract should be used for a document that has "a developed thesis that can be summarized accurately." An indicative abstract should be used for a document that is "varied, broad, or designed for reference purposes and cannot be summarized without distortion." An informative/indicative abstract is best used if a "document has many tables, graphs, charts, attachments, appendices, etc., along with substantive text."

Effective use of each of these abstract types requires that the reader never be confused as to which type of abstract is being used. In the case of an informative/indicative abstract, the reader should always know which words express the author's viewpoint and which express the viewpoint of the abstractor.

B. STYLE AND VOCABULARY

Circle the number that best reflects the intelligibility, logical structure, etc., of the abstract. In many cases you will be called upon to make subjective judgements about the understandability of the abstract or the terms it uses. Some concern has been expressed that this kind of judgement will be difficult to make as we deal with subjects outside of our scope area. Indeed, some latitude must be given based on the subject expertise of the abstractor and the knowledgeability of the intended user. However, if you, as an informed ERIC user, have no idea about the subject of an abstract, the abstract could probably have been clearer.

COMMENTS:

In this section, make any general or specific comments you have on abstract type or style and vocabulary. If you evaluate some aspect of the abstract as less than adequate, please comment specifically on why this was so.

C. INFORMATIONAL CONTENT FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF DOCUMENTS

While the Processing Manual permits Clearinghouses to assign up to three pubtypes to a document, in most cases one pubtype is more indicative of the whole document than the other(s). For example, many research reports (143) include a literature review (070) and a questionnaire (160). All three pubtypes may legitimately be assigned. However, the pubtype 143 is most reflective of the document as a whole. When completing this section of the form, try to decide upon the most applicable pubtype and evaluate the abstract in terms of one set of content areas. If it is not feasible to evaluate the abstract according to a single pubtype, use as many of these pubtype-specific sets of criteria as are applicable.

The Processing Manual provides guidance for the informational content of abstracts for only selected types of documents. In order to avoid the necessity of an "other pubtype" category, we have provided some guidance for the document types that the Processing Manual does not cover. When dealing with these document types (marked by an asterisk on the form), please feel especially free to make use of the "other areas" space provided at the end of the list of content areas. Use this space whenever necessary to indicate a subject the abstract should have reflected.

D. ABSTRACT AS A WHOLE

1. *How long is the abstract? Is this length appropriate?* This word count will enable you to gauge how much more information could be expected of the abstract given our 200-word limitation. In this way we can avoid making unrealistic demands on the abstract. If an abstract has used its 200 words well to cover important aspects of a document, it is unfair to make an extensive list of other topics that should also have been included. If the 200 words are not used or are used ineffectively, it is fair and important to tell the abstractor what other information should have been included.

2. *Are the important topics covered in the document adequately reflected in the abstract?* While the abstract cannot completely cover every topic included in a document, all important topics should be reflected. If you feel a significant aspect of the document has been omitted in the abstract, please indicate so in the comments section. Your responses to Section C of the form may help you to focus your comments.

3. *Is all of the information in the abstract accurate?* Please verify all information provided in the abstract by checking the original document.

5. *How would you rate the abstract as a whole?* Your overall rating of the abstract should be reflective of the evaluations you have given to its choice of abstract type, style and vocabulary, and informational content. In cases where your overall rating is not supported by your ratings and comments on the rest of the form, please explain why. It is altogether possible that an abstract achieve satisfactory ratings in specific areas and still have overall failings. It is also possible that an abstract may do an excellent job of representing the document and still have problems in its style and vocabulary or choice of abstract type. In this case the overall rating may justifiably be higher than ratings on Sections A and B.

ABSTRACT EVALUATION FORM

(WORKING DRAFT)

ERIC Document No. _____ Evaluator/Clearinghouse _____

Clearinghouse Accession No. _____ Document Type _____

Abstractor _____

	Yes/No
A. Selection of Abstract Type	
#1. Is the type of abstract (informative, indicative, mixed) appropriate to the document? See EPM p9-10.	
#2. Is the reader always certain as to whether the viewpoint expressed in the abstract is that of the author or that of the abstractor?	

Comments:

B. Style and Vocabulary	
#3. Is the abstract a single, coherent paragraph containing connected sentences each following the other in logical order?	
#4. Does the abstract have a topic sentence, i.e., some coherent statement of the document's major thesis from which the rest of the abstract develops?	
#5. Are complete sentences used?	
#6. Does the abstract avoid confusingly long and complex sentences?	
#7. Does sentence length vary as much as possible?	
#8. Are new or technical terms and abbreviations or acronyms defined?	
#9. Is the abstract clear, so that it can be read with understanding by all users of the ERIC system?	
#10. Is the abstract free of grammatical or spelling errors?	

Comments:

C. Informational Content (General)	Yes/No
#11. Are all important topics covered in the document reflected in the abstract?	
#12. Is the abstract weighted in the same proportion and with the same emphases as the document?	
#13. Is the reader able to find in the document the full and corresponding information mentioned in the abstract?	

Comments:

D. Informational Content (Specific Types of Documents)	
#14a. If written for a research or technical report, does the abstract contain objectives and hypotheses of the research, methodology, findings and emphasized conclusions, implications or recommendations and limitations?	
#14b. If written for a speech or presentation, does the abstract contain a statement of the premise or thesis, development or ideas or arguments with proofs and major supporting facts, and conclusions?	
#14c. If written for a program description or administrative report, does the abstract contain information on the objectives of the program; the target population; types of special teachers and other personnel involved; total number of students or classes involved; means used to carry out the program; special methods used to overcome problems; progress to date on the program?	
#14d. If written for a textbook or other instructional materials, does the abstract deal with the objectives of the text, the general nature of the subject matter, and special methods used in meeting objectives, such as illustrations, exercises, and accompanying activities?	
#14e. If written for a curriculum or teacher guide, does the abstract indicate the guide's subject and grade level, specific course or program objectives, methods used, and whether supplementary activities and materials are suggested?	
#14f. If written for a bibliography or directory, does the abstract detail subjects considered; the presence of annotations; dates of materials included; types of materials listed; potential users or target audience; and the number of entries?	
#14g. If written for a multiple-author work, does the abstract state the subject and scope of the collection and provide a narration of the table of contents, including authors and titles?	

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	Yes/No
#14h. If written for a test or measurement materials, does the abstract detail the purpose and objective of the test; forms and levels of the test, including length and whether verbal or non-verbal; group to be tested; methods of testing, scoring, and grading; normative data; and information concerning reliability, validity, and test development?	

Comments:

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ABSTRACT EVALUATION FORM

EPIC Document No. _____ Evaluator/Clearinghouse _____

Clearinghouse Accession No. _____ Position _____

Abstractor _____ Document Type _____

A. Selection of Abstract Type

1. Is the type of abstract (information, indicative, mixed) appropriate to the document? Yes ____ No ____
2. If mixed, is the transition between styles smooth and clear? Yes ____ No ____
3. Can the reader determine whose viewpoint is being expressed (author or abstractor)? Yes ____ No ____

B. Style and Vocabulary

The abstract:	Not at all	Slightly	Adequately	Completely
1. is coherent.	1	2	3	4
2. is structured logically.	1	2	3	4
3. is grammatically and orthographically correct.	1	2	3	4
4. is understandable to the nonspecialist.	1	2	3	4
5. has a topic sentence.	1	2	3	4
6. uses complete sentences.	1	2	3	4
7. defines new or technical terms, abbreviations, or acronyms.	1	2	3	4
8. avoids monotonous sentence patterns.	1	2	3	4

COMMENTS: (please comment on any item rated less than satisfactory)

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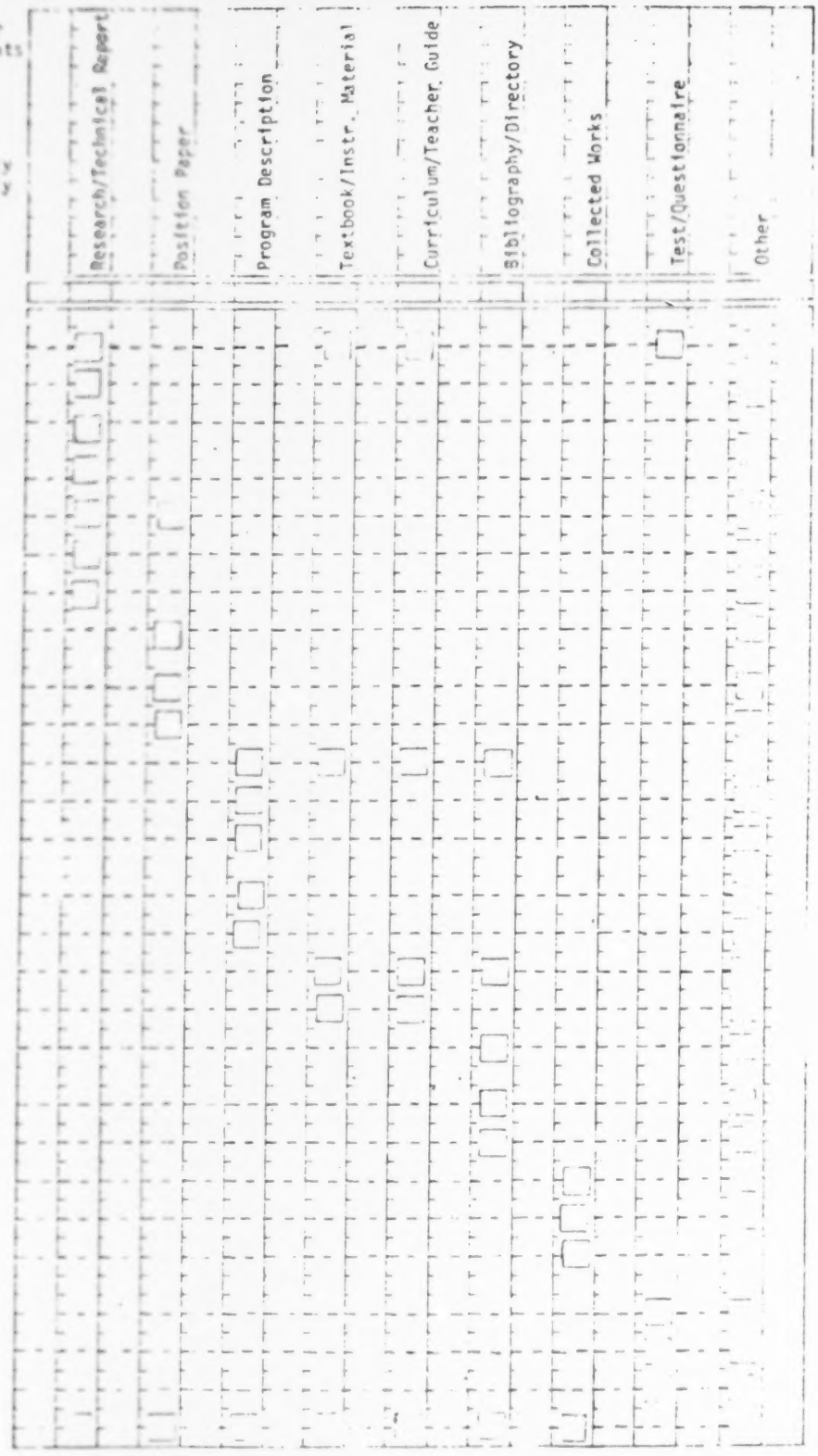
C. Informational Content for Specific Types of Documents

Please rate abstract:

1 - does not cover area
2 - covers area slightly
3 - covers area adequately
4 - covers area completely



1. Objectives
2. Hypotheses
3. Research Methodology
4. Research Findings
5. Conclusions
6. Implications
7. Recommendations
8. Premise or thesis
9. Development of ideas
10. Major supporting facts
11. Target population
12. Personnel involved
13. Number of students, etc.
14. Methods used
15. Progress to date
16. General subject matter
17. Supplementary materials
18. Dates of materials
19. Presence of annotations
20. Number of entries
21. Scope of collection
22. Authors included
23. Titles included
24. Forms and levels
25. Reliability/validity
26. Test development
27. Appendices

COMMENTS:

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D. ABSTRACT AS A WHOLE	Not at all	Slightly	Adequately	Completely
1. Are the important topics covered in the document reflected in the abstract?	1	2	3	4
2. Is the abstract weighted in the same proportion and with the same emphases as the document?	1	2	3	4
3. Is the reader able to find in the document the full and complete information mentioned in the abstract?	1	2	3	4

4. How would you rate the abstract as a whole?

Excellent ____ Good ____ Fair ____ Marginal ____ Poor ____

COMMENTS:

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ABSTRACT EVALUATION FORM

ERIC Document No. ED _____ Evaluator _____

Clearinghouse Accession No. _____ Position _____

Abstractor _____ Clearinghouse _____

Document Type _____

A. Selection of Abstract Type

1.	What is the abstract type? (Circle one)	Informative	Indicative Mixed
2.	Is the type of abstract appropriate to the document?	Yes _____	No _____
3.	If mixed, is the transition between styles smooth and clear?	Yes _____	No _____
4.	Can the reader determine whose viewpoint is being expressed?	Yes _____	No _____

B. Style and Vocabulary

		Not at all	Slightly	Adequately	Completely
1.	The abstract is intelligible.	1	2	3	4
2.	The abstract has a logical structure.	1	2	3	4
3.	The abstract uses correct spelling and grammar.	1	2	3	4
4.	The abstract is understandable to the nonspecialist.	1	2	3	4
5.	The abstract has an adequate topic sentence.	1	2	3	4
6.	The abstract uses complete sentences.	1	2	3	4
7.	The abstract explains new or technical terms, abbreviations, or acronyms. (Answer only if applicable to document in hand.)	1	2	3	4
8.	The abstracts uses varied sentence patterns.	1	2	3	4

COMMENTS: (Please comment on any item rated less than "adequately.")

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C. Informational Content for Specific Types of Documents

Please rate the abstract in the section corresponding to the most applicable Pubtype for the document. In most cases you will only mark one section. Use the following scale:

1 - does not cover area at all
2 - covers area slightly
3 - covers area adequately
4 - covers area completely
n/a - not applicable to document in hand

OLLECTED WORKS (020, 021, 022)

- ubject/scope of collection [ ]
- resentation of authors [ ]
- isting of titles [ ]
- ollective presentation of articles in collection [ ]
- thor areas [ ]
- [ ]

ISSERTATIONS/THESES (040,041,042,043)

- iterature review [ ]
- bjectives of study [ ]
- ypotheses of study [ ]
- esearch methods [ ]
- esearch findings [ ]
- onclusions [ ]
- mplications [ ]
- imitations [ ]
- ecommendations [ ]
- ther areas [ ]
- [ ]

UIDES (050, 052, 055)

- ubject [ ]
- rade level [ ]
- bjectives of guide [ ]
- thods used [ ]
- uggested activities and materials [ ]
- ther areas: [ ]
- [ ]

NSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS (051)

- bjectives [ ]
- rget population [ ]
- ubject matter [ ]
- thods used [ ]
- uggested activities and materials [ ]
- ther areas [ ]
- [ ]

ISTORICAL MATERIALS (060)

- bject [ ]
- thods/sources used [ ]
- nclusions [ ]
- ther areas [ ]
- [ ]

*INFORMATION ANALYSES (070, 071)

- subject/scope [ ]
- materials covered [ ]
- conclusions [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

*STATISTICAL DATA (110)

- subject/scope [ ]
- objectives [ ]
- audience [ ]
- findings [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

VIEWPOINTS, POSITION PAPERS (120)

- necessary background [ ]
- premise or thesis [ ]
- development of ideas [ ]
- major supporting facts [ ]
- conclusions [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

REFERENCE MATERIALS (131, 132)

- subject matter [ ]
- reference to annotations [ ]
- dates of materials [ ]
- types of materials [ ]
- potential users [ ]
- number of entries [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

DESCRIPTIVE REPORTS (141)

- program objectives [ ]
- target population [ ]
- personnel involved [ ]
- number of participants [ ]
- methods used [ ]
- progress to date [ ]
- evaluation of effectiveness [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

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*EVALUATIVE REPORTS (142)

- subject of evaluation [ ]
- evaluation objectives [ ]
- target population [ ]
- personnel involved [ ]
- number of participants [ ]
- methods used [ ]
- progress to date [ ]
- evaluation methods [ ]
- evaluation criteria [ ]
- evaluation results [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

RESEARCH/TECHNICAL REPORTS (143)

- research objectives [ ]
- research hypotheses [ ]
- research methodology [ ]
- findings [ ]
- conclusions [ ]
- implications [ ]
- limitations [ ]
- appendices [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

TESTS/EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS (160)

- purpose [ ]
- forms and levels [ ]
- group to be tested [ ]
- testing, scoring, grading methods [ ]
- normative data [ ]
- test development [ ]
- other areas [ ]
- [ ]

Use the space provided to indicate content areas other than those suggested that were covered or should have been covered in the abstract.

Form pubtypes (010, 030, 150, and 170) are not included, as they should be used in conjunction with other pubtypes. Use other assigned pubtypes.

*These document types are not covered by the ERIC Processing Manual. The content areas provided here are suggestions of things to look for.

D. Abstract as a whole

1. How long is the abstract? _____ words

   Is this length appropriate? Yes _____ No _____

   COMMENTS:

2. Are the important topics covered in the document adequately reflected in the abstract? Yes _____ No _____

   COMMENTS:

3. Is all of the information in the abstract accurate? Yes _____ No _____

   COMMENTS:

4. Is the reader able to find in the document the full and complete information mentioned in the abstract? Yes _____ No _____

   COMMENTS:

5. How would you rate the abstract as a whole?

   Excellent ____ Good ____ Fair ____ Marginal ____ Poor ____

   COMMENTS:

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C.

SAMPLES OF FEEDBACK FROM THE CLEARINGHOUSES TO THE PILOT TESTING OF THE CHECKLIST.

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SOCIAL STUDIES
ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION
855 BROADWAY, BOULDER, COLORADO 80302
(303) 492-8434

November 6, 1981

Dr. Arthur M. Cohen
Director

Ms. Anita Colby
Documents Coordinator
ERIC Ch. for Junior Colleges
University of California
96 Powell Library Building
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90024

Dear Art and Anita:

Thanks for the opportunity of seeing the new forms on the abstract quality project. Some of our staff have done the trial abstracts and Jim, Regina, Syd, and I have discussed the procedures at length. Here are comments and suggestions.

1. We think that going from a two-point to a four-point scale on most of the items is an improvement. We are split on whether three or four is better. But if you do keep a four-point scale, we all feel that it would be better to omit the middle terms, since "slightly" and "adequately" are subject to very different interpretations. Maybe "Not at all" and "Very" for the end-points, without labelling the mid-point(s) would make an easier task for evaluators. On item D-4, we would prefer a four-point scale, omitting "marginal." The two-point scale for A is ok.

2. After the B section, comments are requested--good--but the referent for "less than satisfactory" is not made clear. On a four-point scale, how about asking for comments on items ranked 1 or 2?

3. B-5 is a bit difficult to answer. A yes-no answer for whether there is a topic sentence would be appropriate; then, if there is one, a scaling of its quality.

4. You haven't made provision for reporting of word length. I know you don't think this is important, but if one clearinghouse has abstracts averaging 50 words and another 150 words, I don't believe this can be attributed to differences in subject matter. Either one clearinghouse is too wordy or the other not giving as much information as would be useful, and I suspect the latter.

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5. It is useful to have an overall judgment of the evaluator, as in D-4; but some other global measure or measures of quality would be useful. The evaluations will not be useful unless there is some method of analysis and summary. What will this be?

6. You haven't included anything about the purposes of the study, nor how clearinghouses will be asked to participate in the project (voluntary or required, specified or negotiable number of evaluations, and single or replicated evaluations)--which we suggested previously. It would be useful to inform people about these aspects of the project.

The evaluations which you requested are enclosed. Each one took about 15 minutes. We would be willing to do 12 to 15 evaluations per month.

Best wishes to you and to the project.

Cordially,

Irving Morrissett
Executive Director

IM:cacc

enclosures

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

ERIC Clearinghouse on
Elementary and Early Childhood Education

College of Education
University of Illinois
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, Illinois 61820
(217) 333-1386

November 2, 1981

Dr. Anita Colby
ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
University of California
96 Powell Library Building
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Dear Anita,

Following are several suggestions and comments concerning the Abstract Evaluation Form. These comments and suggestions are fairly persnickety and I believe that they deserve your serious consideration. First, though, may I congratulate you on the form, contents and organization of the evaluation materials. It is clear that you have worked hard on a demanding task.

Abstract Evaluation Form

A. Selection of Abstract Type

A2 should read

If mixed, is the transition between informative and indicative styles smooth and clear?

B. Style and Vocabulary

It is not clear how items B1 and B2 are different. My Oxford American Dictionary defines COHERENT as adj. 1. cohering. 2. connected logically, not rambling in speech or in reasoning. COHERE is defined as v. to stick together, to remain united in a mass, the particles cohere. Since definition 1 is not applicable, that leaves us with definition 2 of coherent. And definition 2 of coherent is nearly the same as item B2.

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If B3 is adequate then it is completely correct (in ref. to grammar and spelling).

B4 can be operationalized away from a surmise about the understanding of the nonspecialist by listing the most important of those features likely to confuse the nonspecialist. Such as,

4. is free of convoluted sentences and esoteric terms.

B5 is an item calling for an absolute judgment, yes or no. One cannot judge whether or not a topic sentence is slightly included.

B6 could be revised Replace "uses" with "consists of"....Again, the presence of one incomplete sentence makes the abstract inadequate and the absence of an incomplete sentence makes the abstract totally adequate. So, this looks appropriate for a yes or no judgment.

OTHER: Change "satisfactory" to "adequate" in the Comments section on page one of the Abstract Evaluation Form. The line should read, Comments: (please comment on any item rated less than adequate) This way we don't have to slice a satisfactory with an adequate.

C. Informational Content for Specific Types of Documents

Some of these categories are vague. To decipher them one has to search through the list and identify the document type with which they are associated. You might suggest to evaluators that they do this if they are uncertain about what an item, such as 'general' subject matter', refers to. When the phrase 'general subject matter' is juxtaposed with Textbook/Inst. Material, Curriculum/Teacher Guide, and Bibliography/Directory (ALL documents dealing primarily with subject matter in a restricted sense) then the meaning of the phrase becomes clear. Likewise with several other phrases on the list.

D. Abstract as a Whole

Item D3 reverses the orientation of abstractors and editors. They are usually looking to see if the contents of the document can be found in the abstract. Here, the evaluator is requested to see if the contents of the abstract can be found in the document. Since this

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is so similar in wording and so different in procedure, maybe a NOTE: statement is advisable. Such as,

Note: See if you can find all of the contents of the abstract in the document.

Now It's Time to Say Goodbye

I am happy that I have had a chance to get some of my comments back to you in time for them to be useful. The earlier agreement to EIES them broke down due to the fact that EIES was turned off, I got a flu virus, and the material you handed out at the NTech Mtng and my comments became lost. Excuses[2]. Hope you like this batch. My impartial assessment of this evaluation project is that it is interesting to do, (if time consuming) and might turn up some interesting findings.

Sincerely yours,

Ron

Ron Hutchison

RH:lv

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D.

CORRESPONDENCE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

UCLA

BERKELEY · DAVIS · IRVINE · LOS ANGELES · RIVERSIDE · SAN DIEGO · SAN FRANCISCO

SANTA BARBARA · SANTA CRUZ

December 7, 1981

ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES
96 POWELL LIBRARY BUILDING
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(213) 825-3931

//2 3* 4* 5, 6
7
8
*9
*10
*11
*12//

Dear //3//:

Here is the final version of the checklist and instructions for participation in the abstract evaluation project. This project was initiated by Central ERIC in response to concern that the abstracting in the ERIC database is uneven. Central ERIC asked us to design and implement a study that would evaluate currently written abstracts in the system and serve as a training experience for abstractors and editors at the Clearinghouses. Your participation in the pilot testing and development of the study design has assured that the project will be an interesting and valuable one.

The project is based on the following premises:

(1) ERIC abstracts can only be evaluated on the basis of the guidelines in the ERIC Processing Manual;

(2) ERIC abstracts can be assessed most effectively by ERIC personnel as these are the people most knowledgeable about ERIC abstracting and their feedback will have the most credibility with the Clearinghouses being evaluated;

(3) an ongoing feedback mechanism will be part of the project design; and

(4) the project will continue long enough for the impact of the evaluations to be demonstrated in the abstracts appearing in Resources in Education.

On the basis of the pilot test, it seems reasonable to expect each Clearinghouse to evaluate sixteen abstracts per month, given that each assessment should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. This will require the Clearinghouses to devote eight person hours per month to the project. As this task can and should be divided among several Clearinghouse staff members, representing both processing and user services personnel, this should not prove an undue burden on the Clearinghouses.

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Each month you will be assigned sixteen randomly selected abstracts and asked to return the completed evaluations within three weeks. This will allow two weeks to complete the task and a week for the completed forms to be returned in the mail. Photocopies of the assessment will be sent to the Clearinghouses who prepared the original abstracts. Processing coordinators, abstractors, and editors should carefully examine the evaluations and initiate corrective measures whenever necessary. Because of this very important training aspect of the project, we must continue to stress the importance of careful, thorough, specific, and constructive evaluations.

Using this procedure we should be able to evaluate the abstracts from seven consecutive months of Resources in Education before the project is completed in July 1982. We have provided for the possibility of mid-course design corrections and will reevaluate the project after the third month to determine whether any changes should be made in the project design.

Our final report, which will be submitted to Central ERIC in August 1982, will discuss abstracting in the system as a whole and will not, unless there are serious and uncorrected problems, identify specific Clearinghouses. Central ERIC intends to use the results of the project for systemwide training at future national and regional technical meetings.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Arthur M. Cohen
Director

X4ERIC/B

Enclosure

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

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SANTA BARBARA · SANTA CRUZ

February 5, 1982

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//2 3 4 5*, 6*
*7
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*11
*12//

Dear //3//:

Enclosed please find the second set of ED numbers for the abstracts to be evaluated by your Clearinghouse. Preliminary analyses of the first set of evaluations have revealed some wide divergences among the Clearinghouses on the qualities of a good abstract. The evaluations we received showed the application of very different standards of excellence and different amounts of effort put into the assessments. These very inconsistent evaluations will not be especially useful to the people who wrote the abstracts and will not be returned to them.

With the intention of achieving a greater level of consistency in the evaluations, certain changes in the study methodology have been made. In the next few months, each abstract will be evaluated by four different clearinghouses. If these evaluations continue to show the same variations found in the first month's assignment, the Junior Colleges Clearinghouse will prepare a composite evaluation for each of the abstracts, based on the input received. This composite assessment will be sent to the evaluators to help them recognize when the standards they have applied are in-house criteria, when they have missed an important problem in an abstract, or when their expectations are too demanding or too lenient.

These changes in the evaluation methodology should have no impact on the amount of time and effort required of your Clearinghouse personnel. However, as we will not need an especially large sample to coordinate evaluation efforts, we are able to reduce the number of abstracts in your monthly assignment to twelve.

Thank you for your continuing support of the project.

Sincerely,

Arthur M. Cohen
Director

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Anita Colby
Documents Coordinator

X4ERIC/E

Enclosure

E.

SAMPLES OF COMPOSITE EVALUATIONS

ED205267

Evaluators: David Tipton (CE)
Syd Meredith (SO)
A. Colby (JC)

Abstractor: PB -- SE

A. Selection of Abstract Type

The abstract takes a primarily indicative approach, although the 2nd and 3rd sentences are informative. The mixed mode was considered by the evaluators to be appropriate to the document; however, two evaluators felt the mixed mode could have been used more effectively.

B. Style and Vocabulary

The evaluators identified a number of stylistic problems with the abstract which they felt made it rather difficult to follow.

All three evaluators felt that the abstract was slightly intelligible, due primarily to the long and confusing sentence patterns used and to the somewhat confusing way the sentences stated the scope of Project Synthesis.

Two of the evaluators felt the abstract could have been more logically structured had it followed the format of the document more closely.

The abstract was considered to use correct grammar and spelling by two of the evaluators. One evaluator felt that the parenthetical statement in sentence #1 would have been clearer had it included a verb.

All three evaluators found the abstract to be only slightly understandable to the nonspecialist, pointing out a lack of explanation of "the national survey," " the focus groups," and "four student goal clusters."

Two of the evaluators felt that the abstract used completed sentences, with one evaluator reiterating the comment that the parenthetical statement could have used a verb to increase its clarity.

Two evaluators noted that the abstract consisted of three sentences, two of which were identical in structure and awkwardly long.

C. Informational Content for Specific Types of Documents

None of the evaluators found the content areas specified on the form especially applicable to the document.

D. Abstract as a Whole

1. Length (151 words)

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Two of the evaluators felt that the abstract was too short and that the additional 50 words alloted by the processing manual could have been used to provide additional information.

2. Are the important topics covered in the document adequately reflected in the abstract?

Two of the evaluators felt that several important topics were not covered; one evaluator felt that while the important topics were reflected in the abstract, it failed to provide the user with a picture of the document itself.

All evaluators felt that the abstract was accurate and that the information it contained was to be found in the document.

Two of the evaluators rated the abstract as poor; one rated it as fair feeling that despite its problems the abstract provided a reasonable representation of the topics covered in a form that was not entirely unreadable.

One evaluator offered the following alternative as a method for dealing with the document (this alternative has been modified somewhat to address the comments and criticisms of the other evaluators):

ABST:: Project Synthesis was a research study designed to synthesize and interpret information found in a database composed of: (1) the results of an extensive review of research on science education; (2) a research study assessing the status of precollege science education; (3) case studies in science education; (4) a national survey of science education; (5) a review of journal literature; and (6) an analysis of science texts. Using this data, five working groups sought to assess precollege science education and recommend future activities. The five groups focused on the tasks from the different perspectives of biological sciences; physical sciences; inquiry in school science; science, technology, and society in secondary schools; and elementary school science. The first two sections of the monograph on Project Synthesis describe its background, purpose, organization, and procedures. Sections III through VII contain edited versions of the five working group reports. Each report evaluates science education in the focus area with respect to clusters of student goals related to personal needs, societal issues, academic preparation, and career education awareness. These reports use a discrepancy model to describe the actual and ideal states of education in their focus area and discuss the descrepancies between these states. After Sections VIII and IX offer recommendations for the science instructor and a bibliography, Section X lists priorities for improving science education. (SM/DT/AYC/KL/HB)

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RE: ED 209 063

Evaluators: Paula Wagemaker (PS)
Mary Niebuhr (FL)
Stan Helgeson (SE)
Francie Gilman (SP)
Maryellen LoBosco (UD)
Anita Colby (JC)
Attendees at the Eastern Regional Technical Meeting

ABSTRACTOR: NEC (RC)

A. Selection of Abstract Type

The evaluators all agreed that the abstract was written in the informative mode. Most agreed that the mode was appropriate; one evaluator, however, felt the abstract should have been written in the indicative mode. Most were able to determine whose viewpoint was being expressed; one indicated that the reader could not determine this.

B. Style and Vocabulary

For the most part the abstract was rated as at least adequate in the areas of style and vocabulary. There was general agreement about certain problems:

> Most evaluators felt that the first sentence was too long. Some found it confusing. Even those who did not find it confusing felt that it should have been broken into at least two sentences, e.g., "During a 1979-1980 pilot project, 13 nine-week residencies by professional artists were sponsored in 10 eastern Oregon school districts. Eastern Oregon College served as liaison during the project, the Northwest Area Foundation..."
>
> Several evaluators felt that the abstract lacked a logical structure. They indicated: " the abstract tends to leap from topic to topic"; "project procedures should have been treated before the outlook for the future, which should, logically, be last"; "the transition between the topic sentence and second second was ackward. School funding reference was not clear to me."
>
> With respect to the topic sentence, the most frequent comment concerned its length. Some evaluators felt that it also distorted the tone and content of the document.
>
> One evaluator commented that the reference to the "State Arts Commission guidelines" was very vague and that as the document failed to give any information on these guidelines, the abstract might have done better not to include this reference.

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C. Informational Content for Descriptive Reports

A fairly wide range was represented in the evaluator's ratings of content coverage:

	Adequately covered (3/4)	Not Adequately covered (1/2)	Not Applicable
program objectives	2	7	0
target population	3	8	0
personnel involved	12	0	0
number of participants	3	1	9
methods used	2	5	1
progress to date	2	3	1
evaluation of effectiveness	0	4	2

(The reason these rows each have different totals is the inconsistent collection of responses during tech meeting discussions)

D. Abstract as a Whole

1. Length (169 words)

Two of the evaluators were satisfied with the length; 3 felt it should have been longer; 2 felt it should have been shorter. Those that recommended shortening the abstract commented:

"This is a difficult document to abstract concisely. Some information in the abstract was brief to the point of inaccuracy or tantalization, and could have been left out."

"The whole abstract could be shortened--indicative mode which briefly states what the document is about (or as much as the abstractor can ascertain what the document is about).would have been better I think. Would probably have reduced the unwieldly and confusing nature of the abstract."

2. Coverage of Important Topics

Three evaluators felt that the abstract covered the document's important topics. Three indicated that the important topics had not been adequately reflected. They noted:

"Some of the topics are overrepresented and others not represented at all. The abstract goes off ona fiscal tangent and I am left wondering what the artist residency program is about and how it relates to rural schools."

"The actual case histories could/should have been included to 'firm it up'".

"Among the topics not covered are the unique features of the program, the Regional Arts Council, variations among districts, and examples of the use of residency programs. Perhaps the abstractor might have been able to mention these aspects of the document and at the same time give an indication of how

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3. Accuracy

The evaluators agreed that the abstract was accurate.

4. Is the reader able to find in the document the full and complete information mentioned in the abstract?

While most evaluators agreed that the abstract contained no information that was not in the document, some felt that the over-emphasis in the abstract on the financial aspects of the document provided a distorted image of the document's actual content.

5. Overall ratings

3 good; 2 fair; 2 marginal; 1 poor

Comments:

"The abstract tends to over-emphasize the funding and deemphasize the program itself, although the document includes little concrete information about the program."

"I do not think the abstractor is entirely to blame for the status of the abstract. I found that the purpose of the program was evident only implicitly in the document and I know there is always a danger of trying to fit such implicit information into a form that could indicate to the reader of the abstract that what is written there is in fact what can be found in the document. Either the author of the document should have been contacted for clarification or the document should have been rejected. As a reader, I want to know what the program is about and what it means or says for educational practice in rural schools. I didn't get that information. Because I don't know what the program's purpose and intent was from the abstract I was left wondering how the information given in the abstract fitted in with the program as a whole. Essentially, the abstract leans too heavily in one direction -- giving particulars about the program without addressing what the program was about in general."

"The abstract's overall weight and order to not adequately reflect the document, though the document itself was no peach."

"The abstract did not get across the excitedment about the project, the 'plug' the author is putting in for the school districts to fund this program. I thought this should have been included."

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EVALUATIONS OF ED 205 273

EVALUATORS: Helen Mamarchev (CG)
Anita Colby (JC)
David Tipton (CE)
John Brosseau (FL)

ABSTRACTOR: MP -- PS

A. Selection of Abstract Type

The indicative mode selected for the abstract was considered appropriate for the document and to have been used effectively.

B. Style and Vocabulary

The abstract was rated highly by all evaluators in all areas of style and vocabulary. One evaluator did comment that repeating "the document" in line 12 was unnecessary and that a synonym should have been used.

C. Informational Content for Teacher Guides

The evaluators agreed that the guide's subject, grade level, objectives, methods, and suggested materials had been adequately or completely covered. One indicated that the appendices and bibliographies at the end of each chapter might have been mentioned.

D. Abstract as a Whole

1. Length (130 words)

Two evaluators felt that the abstract was somewhat short and that the additional 70 words could have been used to provide additional information.

2. Coverage of Important Topics

One evaluator felt that all important topics had been covered. The other evaluators collectively noted (though did not necessarily agree) that the following areas should have been covered; appendices; bibliographies; materials for the Kindergarten - Grade One transition; physical space needs of children in the classroom environment; contemporary background (first chapter); and glossary of terms.

3. Accuracy

The evaluators all found the abstract to be generally accurate, although one evaluator noted that the parents were not only helped to understand the child's ...development; but are helped to help the child develop.

4. All evaluators were able to find in the document the full and complete information mentioned in the abstract.

5. Ratings: 1 excellent; 3 good

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One evaluator suggested that a chapter-by-chapter approach, which followed the main divisions of the table of contents, would have permitted the abstractor to provide general statements about the document's coverage, as well as more detail about each subject area dealt with.

ABSTRACTING WORKSHOP:

Draft Agenda and Timeline

Optimizing ERIC Abstracting Quality

DAY 1

9:00 - 9:30 Anita Colby	SUMMARY OF ABSTRACTING PROJECT
9:30 - 10:30 Harold Borko	THE PURPOSE OF THE ABSTRACT The overall purpose of abstracts and their possible functions as document surrogates, free text searching sources, or content summaries will be addressed.
10:30 - 10:45	BREAK
10:45 - 12:00 *Betty Rose de Rios	INFORMATIVE VS. INDICATIVE ABSTRACTS The EPM guidelines will be reviewed in terms of the criteria for selecting informative, indicative, or mixed abstract types.
12:00 - 1:00	LUNCH
1:00 - 4:30	APPLYING THE GUIDELINES FOR ABSTRACTS: THREE CONCURRENT SESSIONS Clearinghouse Preparation: Anita Colby will select 3 documents already in the system, one which lends itself best to an informative abstract, one indicative, one mixed. All participants will abstract the same 3 documents and bring their abstracts and a copy of the document. In sessions, they will compare which kind of abstract they produced for each and will discuss why one fits bets. All will take part in all 3 sessions.
*Anita Colby	Indicative
Betty Rose de Rios	Informative
*Sydney Meredith	Mixed
4:30 - 5:30 Anita Colby	REVIEW AND CLOSURE The findings of the day will be reviewed and discussed and closure will be attempted for remaining problems.

DAY 2

9:00 - 12:00
Anita Colby

INFORMATION INCLUDED IN ABSTRACTS
Part 1: Participants will review the EPM guidelines to identify the information which is recommended for inclusion in abstracts for some document types.
HANDOUTS: Perhaps one sheet showing document type and the list of information the EPM suggests should be included, e.g., (see below) and an example of a good abstract for the same document.

VIEWPOINTS, POSITION PAPERS (120)

necessary background [ ]
premise or thesis [ ]
development of ideas [ ]
major supporting facts [ ]
conclusions [ ]
other areas [ ]

Part 2: Participants will talk about document types not addressed in the EPM and will attempt to put together a list of such items.
HANDOUTS: Same as above.

12:00 - 1:00

LUNCH

1:00 - 2:00
*Helen Mamarchev

THE POTENTIALS OF FORMATING
Several clearinghouses have developed formats to apply to several document types. These formats establish a set pattern to the presentation of information, and the abstractor modifies the pattern to provide information about a particular document. A panel of representatives from those clearinghouses using this approach with success will discuss the formats developed and the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of use.

2:00 - 3:30
Anita Colby

PROBLEM DOCUMENTS
Clearinghouse Preparation: Each clearinghouse will bring a sample of a special "problem document" and the abstract used and be prepared to comment on why it was handled in the manner it was.
SESSION STRUCTURE: After introduction to build the context, we will break out into 6 groups for discussion. The following people will be asked to act as facilitators for discussion. (Since there is no right or wrong answer to these, it was felt there would be no need for these people to do a lot of preparation): David Tipton, **Dorothy Beling, Ron Hutchison, Barb Minor, Barb Wildemuth, Roger Walke.

3:30 - 3:45

BREAK

3:45 - 5:00
*Lynn Barnett

STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS AND THE ROLE OF ABSTRACT EDITORS
Discussion will center about the impact of logical structuring, topic sentences, explanations of new or technical terms, and varied sentence patterns to the overall usefulness of an abstract. Clearinghouses will discuss how they approach the editing function: procedures they use, why the step is important.

5:00 - 5:30
Anita Colby

Wrap-up

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DAY 3

9:00 - 11:00	SELECTING/TRAINING NEW ABSTRACTORS AND MAINTAINING QUALITY CONTROL
*Jane McClellan Sydney Meredith	Discussion will center on clearinghouse experiences in training and selecting abstractors. Problems and benefits associated with in-house and freelance abstractors will be considered and methods of balancing quality and productivity discussed.
11:00 - 11:15	BREAK
11:15 - 12:30	ONGOING SYSTEM OF MAINTAINING QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN ABSTRACT WRITING
Anita Colby	Clearinghouse Preparation: Participants will come with suggestions for ways to do this and will be ready to debate the pros and cons of same. A preliminary consensus and a recommendation to Central ERIC will be the goal of this session.
1:30 - 3:30	Steering Committee meets to corsider evaluations of workshop and recommendations of participants .

* Preparation of Major Session leaders

One meeting in January 1983 (see time line).

** Preparation of Concurrent Session Facilitators

This can be handled through a letter to individuals with instructions on the purpose of the session and how to proceed.

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tracting Workshop Timeline

September 15, 1982	Directors' meeting announcement and discussion of workshop
October 1, 1982	Confirm session leaders (A. Colby)
October 20, 1982	Clearinghouse Mailing from Steering Committee or Central ERIC. Purpose: to build enthusiasm and support early by pointing to the objectives of the workshop as professional development and improvement of the ERIC system. Mailing will stress that six Clearinghouses and the Facility have participated in the development of the workshop and its agenda. The preliminary agenda will be sent with the mailing and suggestions/comments will be due back to A. Colby November 1.
November 1, 1982	Agenda will be revised based on Clearinghouse input. Steering committee will be advised and session leaders announced.
November 15-17, 1982	Steering Committee Meets in DC. Purpose: National Technical Meeting Agenda and discussion of workshop agenda.
January 10, 1983	Clearinghouse Mailing. Purpose: Instructions for exercises and activities to be accomplished prior to the workshop.
February 14-15, 1983	National Technical Meeting
February 16-18, 1983	Abstracting Workshop

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